

CAPITAL CITY AIRPORT
(Capital City Airport, Quonset Huts)
North Side of Grand River Avenue
Lansing Vicinity
Clinton County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-320-G

HAER
MICH
19-LAND.V.
18-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
Northeast Field Area
Chesapeake/Allegheny System Support Office
National Park Service
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

HAER
MICH
19-LANON,
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CAPITAL CITY AIRPORT, Quonset Huts

HAER No. MI-320-G

Location: Capital City Airport, West Ramp Area
Lansing vicinity, Clinton County, Michigan

UTM: 16.696140.4738450
Quad: Lansing North, 1:24,000

Date of Construction: 1941

Engineer: Butler Manufacturing Co.
Architect: None

Present Owner: State of Michigan
Department of Transportation
Bureau of Aeronautics
Lansing, Michigan

Present Occupants: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The three Quonset Huts are significant for primarily two reasons. First, they are among the last few remaining examples in Michigan of what was a common World War II military structure type. Second, they were directly involved in the war effort during World War II as the home of Lansing's Civil Air Patrol unit, the first established in Michigan, for housing the U.S. Air Force and Civil Air Patrol ground and flight training schools for military and civilian pilots, and as a mission base for fliers from three Midwestern states departing for patrol duties on the east coast of the United States. While not participating in the growth and technological changes in the aviation industry, the Quonset Huts, nevertheless, contribute to the overall significance of the West Ramp.

Project Information: The Quonset Huts are identified airport hazards under the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) standards, and are scheduled for removal. The Huts are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and, therefore, would require mitigation of the adverse effect caused by their removal. The Memorandum of Agreement (1995), and its amendment, stipulates documentation of the Quonset Huts according to HAER guidelines. This documentation was undertaken to fulfill that stipulation.

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The Quonset Huts were erected at Capital City Airport in November 1941 near the Hughes Flying Service complex for the purpose of housing the newly established 9622nd U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve Recovery Unit. Shortly thereafter, they also housed the headquarters of the Lansing unit of the national Civil Air Patrol (CAP), which was officially established on December 1, 1941. The CAP, according to Darlene Smith, Commanding Officer (pers. com. 1991) "worked closely with Air Corps reserve units, [providing] ground school [training] to military and civilian pilots."

The CAP as a whole was organized by civilian aviators who wanted to support the war effort, and address the concerns that civilian pilots, aircraft mechanics, and others had in the late 1930s about the need for strengthened air power and the potential role that civilians might play in the likely event of war. In 1948, the CAP was made the official auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, after being recognized for its outstanding contributions to the war effort, particularly in the area of search and rescue. This official designation allowed members to have access to U.S. air bases and facilities (Smith, pers. com. 1990). The CAP is an all volunteer organization that has three primary missions: aerospace education, emergency services, and cadet leadership training.

For the duration of World War II, the Quonset Huts served as a major flight training center nationwide for civilian and military pilots in both the CAP and the U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve Recovery Unit. After the war, the buildings continued to be used until 1958 when they were dismantled and stored in the Hughes Flying Service hangar because they were considered possible military targets and a threat to the Capital City Airport. Members met in Hughes' office building classroom. Re-erected in 1963 near the original site, the buildings were turned over to the CAP for meeting purposes and resumed their role as CAP training facilities. The U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve Recovery Unit was phased out in 1963. Until a few years ago, the Scott M. Burgess Cadet Squadron 15-5, Civil Air Patrol, used these structures for a variety of purposes including: headquarters and classrooms for Squadron 15-5, Group 15 headquarters and supply, a base for Lansing search and rescue missions, and as a training center for first aid and CPR, emergency services, ground-team training, and Michigan Wing radiological monitoring.

The three Quonset Huts at Capital City Airport are currently situated side-by-side, slightly southwest of the Francis Aviation/White Star Photography complex. They are half-cylindrical, pre-fabricated steel structures consisting of corrugated steel panels placed horizontally over arched steel ribs and purlins to provide lateral support (Brooks-Miller and Christensen 1991, sec.7, p.1). All of the structures measure 18' x 48' and have a center height of 11' (Brooks-Miller and Christensen 1991, sec. 7, p.1). They were originally painted gray and, later, blue. Now two of them are painted light blue and the other brown. In general, Quonset Huts were designed to rest either on concrete or wood foundations. The Quonsets at Capital City Airport rest on wood pallet foundations (Brooks-Miller and Christensen 1991, sec.7, p.1).

Each quonset structure at Capital City Airport has eight 31" x 39" windows, four to each side, and a 36" x 84" door on each end wall (Brooks-Miller and Christensen 1991, sec.7, p.1). The windows are hinged at the top of the frame and open out from the bottom. The interiors were originally furred out and lined with a hardboard paneling (Brooks-Miller and Christensen 1991, sec.7, p.1). Interior spaces within the three buildings vary, with two of the buildings being subdivided into storage and office space, while the third has an open floor plan.

Quonset Huts were innovative, military structures developed during the days immediately

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preceding World War II by the George A. Fuller Company, one of the construction companies involved in building the Quonset Point base in Rhode Island. They were specifically designed to be "inexpensive and quick to manufacture, compact and lightweight to ship, easy to erect at distant bases, cool in the tropics, warm in the arctic, rigid under hurricane-level winds, capable of supporting sandbags against bombardment, and adaptable to a wide variety of uses. Forty-eight programs, from hospitals to kitchens to barracks to warehouses to latrines were eventually accommodated in standard units" (Brooks-Miller and Christensen 1991, sec.8, p.2). The Quonset Huts at Capital City Airport were reportedly built by the Butler Manufacturing Company and shipped to Lansing. They are among the few remaining examples in Michigan of such complexes of this building type constructed at airports and military bases during the war, and on state university campuses after the war (Brooks-Miller and Christensen 1991, sec.8, p.3). After surviving an airport plan to raze the buildings in the 1980s, the buildings are again facing demolition for the purposes of airport expansion, and compliance with FAA regulations requiring a wider clear zone associated with the runways.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. ENGINEERING DRAWINGS

No drawings of the Quonset Huts were found.

B. HISTORIC VIEWS

No historic views of the Quonset Huts were found.

C. INTERVIEWS

No interviews for the Quonset Huts were conducted.

D. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brooks-Miller, S. and R.O. Christensen. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. May 1991. *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the 9622nd Army Air Corps Reserve Recovery Unit/Civil Air Patrol Quonset Huts*. Lansing, Michigan.

Smith, D. Memo to the Michigan Aeronautical Commission, 29 December 1990. A copy of the memo is available in the offices of the Capital Region Airport Authority.

Smith, D. Letter to Thomas W. Schmidt, Capital Region Airport Authority, 12 January 1991. A copy of the letter is available in the offices of the Capital Region Airport Authority.

GRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

No graphic documents of the Quonset Huts were found.